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THE MENTAL AND MORAL TRAINING OF CHILDREN.

BY JAMES WELTON, M.A.

(Continued from page 109).

AND first as to what we shall teach. Our aim is, in accordance with what I have already said, to implant ideas in the child's mind which will be fruitful in good conduct; ideas *i.e.* which will give rise to desires for what is good. We want, in a word, our instruction to gradually so organize the child's knowledge of the world that he may see more and more clearly the consequences of his actions. What then is the relation between the material of instruction and the child, which will prompt the latter to spontaneous activity in the direction of that subject matter? It is that relation which we call *interest*. Interest is the basis of spontaneous action, for interest prompts desire for further knowledge of the subject, for further mastery in that department of activity. Interest, in other words, leads through desire to will. Interesting instruction is then that instruction which makes for the formation of character, and in its power of exciting interest we find the criterion of the suitability of any study to the child. But the interest to be of educative value must be direct interest in the subject matter of instruction itself. No indirect interest which may be promoted by outside considerations such as the offering of rewards is of real educative value. Such interest may, indeed, pave the way for true and direct interest, but unless it does so it is educationally worthless, and often worse than worthless. For not only does such interest not give the child fruitful ideas of a noble and generous character, but by its appeal to a low and selfish motive it adds strength to that selfishness which exists in every child's mind. In what subjects then do children feel interest? Put in this general form it is evident the question

is unanswerable, for interest is distinctly relative to the child. It depends fundamentally upon the child's power to understand the subject, and this again depends upon what is already known of that or cognate subjects. This leads us to see that interest depends upon the method of teaching a subject quite as much as upon the subject itself. Even the best and most appropriate material of instruction may be made lifeless and uninteresting by a bad method of presenting it to the child. For if the teacher makes no use of what the child already knows, if the new matter is presented as something altogether strange and out of all relation to the child and its life, then the arousing of interest is impossible; for understanding of the new subject is impossible. For instance, to how many little ones is the teaching of reading made unutterably dry and repellant, because the teacher refuses to start from that with which the child is already familiar? She neglects the fact that the child can already talk, and is thus familiar with words and sentences, and she plunges him into a new world of letters—a world utterly unintelligible because the letters are entirely unfamiliar to him; he knows them not, he cares not for them, he sees not their use; to him their purpose is all too often apparently to be instruments of personal annoyance and ennui. But let the teacher start with words and all is changed. Yes, he knows a cat, and he recognizes the picture of a cat; the picture of the *word* cat then he is quite ready to welcome, for he sees where that is leading. His teacher, by reading, becomes acquainted with pretty stories, he also is on the way to attain that power. Thus he is interested, and his interest is increased considerably if the teaching of writing is carried on simultaneously with that of reading; for now he hopes not only to be able to gain new pleasure for himself from reading, but to be able to communicate it to those he loves even when they are absent from him.

By taking this example I do not mean it to be inferred that I consider such subjects as reading and writing as the first subjects which should be presented to a child, or as ever forming the main part of a child's instruction. By no means. I used them only as an illustration which would probably be familiar to all of us. Reading and writing are in their very nature only means towards the attainment and expression of

knowledge; they are not, in themselves, knowledge. All true knowledge is of the real and actual, either in the world of matter or in that of mind. Into this world—this world of a double aspect—the child is born; the problem of his life is to become thoroughly at home in it, so as to play his part in it well and nobly. And this problem he begins to solve as soon as he begins to exist. For the child is essentially active; he is incessantly seeking to know the world in which he is placed. And what a task it is that is set before him! Well may we endeavour to understand how he sets about it that we may aid him in its accomplishment. Now, at first, all is confused. Impressions of all kinds pour in upon him from all sides; it is all a chaos, and a chaos which is only very gradually reduced to order. Very soon some impressions from among the mass begin to stand out more prominently; they are more vivid, as, for example, in the case of a bright light, and consequently attract more notice from the child. Then as these striking impressions are repeated again and again, they begin to be recognized, and the real acquirement of knowledge has begun. And throughout life it is the same general process. To know anything means to relate it to something already known, and the more perfect is this relation the more thorough is the knowledge obtained. As this is the fundamental point in the acquirement of all knowledge, let me illustrate it a little more. For it is often assumed that all the knowledge we get about an object is obtained from the object itself, and thus we are exhorted to cultivate the observing powers of children in terms which would imply that such cultivation is the Alpha and Omega of education. But it is not so. If it were, then any two persons looking at the same object—assuming their physical powers of sight to be equal—would obtain exactly the same knowledge of it. How different is the reality! A physician and a layman both may see the same sick person: the object presented to their senses is identical; but the physician understands more, and therefore really *sees* more in the patient than the layman does. His previous knowledge enables him to detect symptoms which to the layman are simply non-existent. Or, again, an engineer and a person with no knowledge of machines pass through the same gallery of machinery in some exhibition. The same objects are present to the sight of both: but at

the end, whilst the one has only a confused jumble of ideas of wheels and pistons, the other has a clear comprehension of the machines he has seen—the wheels and pistons are to him related constituent parts of intelligible wholes.

All this is obvious when it is pointed out. And the lesson to be drawn from it is equally obvious. It is that the only way of acquiring knowledge is to bring the new matter presented to us into relation to what we already know. The more we know about any department of knowledge, the more we understand of any fresh instance in that department which is brought before us. Now, this is the general process of acquisition in childhood and in manhood. It is this employment of knowledge already possessed to give meaning to sense impressions which alone makes growth of knowledge possible. To take another example. I hear a shrill whistle—nothing else is presented to sense. Yet my existing knowledge enables me to interpret this whistle as a sign of an approaching train. I can imagine the engine, the carriages and their occupants; I can picture the train's speedy journey, the track over which it passes, its arrival at the station with the attendant bustle, and much more. Of all this the simple whistle serves as a sign; all this is involved in my *understanding* of the whistle. Now, to a person who had never seen nor heard of a train the whistle would suggest none of this, it would be a somewhat unpleasant sensation of hearing and nothing more. Unless it was very intense then, it would have no interest for him—no power of attracting his attention. But for me it *has* interest, and the greater my knowledge, the greater that interest. If, for example, I know that the whistle is sounded on a train I am waiting for, and which includes amongst its passengers a friend whom I am anxious to see and whom I have come to meet, then the interest I feel in the whistle is enormously increased, for now it has a personal reference to myself. And thus it is throughout. Interest and power of comprehension, that is, interest and precedent knowledge, are inextricably bound up together. Let me give an example of this.* A small child was taken to the British Museum and on its return was questioned as to what it had

* Instanced by Mr. T. G. Rooper in his excellent monograph on the process of acquiring knowledge, *A Pot of Green Feathers*.

noticed most. It was the great size of the doormats! Now, why was this? The doormats would certainly not be the most interesting objects to an educated adult, and they are certainly not the rarest or most beautiful objects in the museum. But the little child had some previous knowledge of doormats—these it could relate to its past experience, whilst of the majority of objects in the museum it had no such knowledge—they made no impression upon its mind, they were not recognized, and their very multiplicity simply caused mental confusion and consequent inertia; there was no interest aroused. From all this we may learn that it is no good to present to children material of knowledge in which they can detect no relation to what they already know. We may teach them to memorize words and formulæ, but real knowledge can come only when, amidst the novelty of the new matter, the child can find elements of familiarity which give him a starting-point for his investigation of it. That which is too unfamiliar affects us not at all unless it is of a very startling character, when it may arouse surprise. And surprise is only a momentary feeling; it *awakens* the attention. But unless the attention when awakened can find some point of familiarity on which to fasten, it does not dwell on the object; it passes it by as devoid of interest. Here again then we see the necessity for preserving unity in education. Not only must we connect together in as many ways as we can the different kinds of knowledge we give to our children, but we must also connect the different elements in the same department of knowledge into a systematic whole. And thus we have found the general answer to our question as to *how* we shall teach children. Every method is good which thus connects knowledge, and which, as a consequence, awakens a true and living interest.

And we have also found a general answer to the other question as to *what* we shall teach; for we have found that this must be determined to a large extent by what the child can learn by himself. But perhaps on this latter point it will be well to be a little more explicit. Our object, remember, is to help the child to become at home in the world of things and of men. To do this we must start from his immediate surroundings if we would follow the general method I have sketched. And our work will broadly divide

itself into two branches—instruction about men and instruction about things. In other words, literature and nature form the two grand departments of real knowledge, in which all children naturally take an interest. I need not bring forward any argument to prove that this is so. Every parent knows that children delight in stories and tales suited to their comprehension, and dealing with incidents and emotions which they can realize in themselves. And every parent knows equally well that children delight to be told about flowers and birds and other objects both of animate and inanimate nature with which they are brought into daily contact. Both these natural interests must be cultivated, for knowledge in both departments is essential to a true education. We are not called on to give the palm to either, but we may notice that literature appeals more to the feelings of the children, and lends itself more directly to moral instruction than does nature study. For by means of stories we can bring before the children examples of virtue in such a way that they are led to admire them, and are stirred up to desire to emulate them. And as the child gets older, history properly taught serves the same direct ethical purpose. To literature and history in chief amongst the subjects of instruction we must trust to fill the children with ideas of great and noble conduct, to cultivate in them feelings of sympathy and love of justice, in a word to develop interest in ideas of good conduct—ideas which will, when such interest is aroused, be fruitful and bear fruit in good and noble acts. The mother then, for it is the mother who is chiefly concerned with the early education of her children, should be always ready to respond to the frequent demand of the little one for a story, with one which will appeal to its best feelings, and which will stimulate its will. And that it may do this it is essential that it should deal with incidents such as can be easily pictured by the child, and should involve no reference to emotions of a more complex nature than the young and undeveloped child can experience. On this I need probably say no more. I only wish to emphasize my opinion that such story-telling can be made educative in the highest sense of the word, and I would add it will be most educative if the child is left to draw his moral for himself. Encourage him to talk over the story by all means, but do

not spoil it by a formal and didactic statement of the moral lesson it is intended to enforce.

When we turn to the other branch of instruction—that in the realities of nature—our task is a more difficult one. For here the wealth of material is so enormous that it is by no means easy to know what to select. There is a temptation to flit from object to object and to really get to know none. And this temptation is the greater because the child has naturally but very little power of concentrating his attention, and will, if left to himself, wander about from object to object like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower in a garden. But it must not be yielded to, or the instruction will not be really educative. For one of the great things to be done is to train this very power of concentration of attention, and to form the habit of thoroughness in all that is undertaken. On the other hand we do not want to make our little ones into premature specialists. These two considerations can both be met when we select for the objects of study typical examples of the great fields of natural knowledge. Of course, in speaking of actual study, I am referring to children who have already made some progress in getting used to the world; for the little one there should be no study, in any accurate use of that term at all. They may be led to notice the common objects around them more and more accurately, and to connect them one with another. And, of course, their power of doing this is increased by the use of names. Do not let us be afraid of giving our children a name when once they have an idea of that which the name denotes. And by this I do not mean a perfect and complete idea—that can only come with much increase of knowledge—but such an idea as will enable them to use the name intelligently. Now here a very interesting question is raised as to whether the names we teach first should be the more general or the more specific names. If, for instance, there is a rose in the garden, shall we tell the little one just learning to speak it is a rose, or shall we give it the more general name flower? If we do the former then the child will certainly call many flowers by the name rose which have no claim to that title. This he will do partly because he is largely unconscious of any except the most striking differences—a little one, for example, calls all men 'papa'—and partly because in endeavouring to

unify the world of his experience he assimilates new objects to those which most nearly resemble them. If then we begin with the specific name, we shall by-and-by have something to correct; there will be something to unlearn. But if we begin with the general name this necessity will not arise—the child will call all flowers by that general name even as he calls all birds 'dickies,' for in that case it is usual to begin with the more general name. Then when he notices differences he will feel a need for more specific names, and their acquirement has a real educative value as enabling him to more perfectly organize his knowledge. Language and knowledge must grow together, and each is an aid to the other.

The objects we should by preference lead the child to get to know well are those which are continually part of his own experience. Let him get thoroughly at home amongst the surroundings of his every day life, and then he will gradually acquire a store of knowledge on which he can draw as an aid to understanding the strange, and to him curious, objects to be found in distant lands. A mistake is often made here. The every-day objects of the home life are passed over as containing nothing of interest, and the child is given a picture of some strange object which he has never seen—say of a lion. Now the power to understand such a picture can only come when the child is well accustomed to pictures of objects with which he is familiar, and even then the picture is but a sorry substitute for the real thing. There is plenty to interest the child in the home surroundings if only they be treated intelligently. Though he often sees an object he knows but little about it unless he has examined it under the guidance of his mother or teacher, and has thought about it not only in itself, but in its connexion with other things.

And lastly, for I would not trespass longer on your kindness, let me urge you to make use of the child's love of activity. You know the boy *will* be doing something—of mischief if nothing else offers. Turn this activity into an educative channel. Let the child learn to use its hands. Give it a box of paints and some brushes, and let it try and represent on paper some object over which you have been talking with it. The result will not be of great

artistic merit of course, but the doing of it will have had no small educative value. For to represent an object requires first of all that it be carefully observed, and next trains the hand to be the ready servant of the eye, and both to express the thought of the mind. Or let the child model things in clay, or cut out representations of them in paper. All such exercises—and many of a like kind—form a regular part of Kindergarten instruction, and home instruction of the little ones should be of the character of a less systematic Kindergarten.

And here I will draw my remarks to a close. They have necessarily been very general and somewhat fragmentary owing to the great width of the subject I undertook to speak to you upon, and the limitation of time available for so speaking, but I think the general principle will be clear. Unify your instruction and adapt it to the stage of the child's development, using as your test its power of exciting interest. In that way I think, if too much be not attempted, the child will be best prepared by its home life to enter on the more systematic studies of the school, and there need be no break in the general educative process. Let me then conclude with a short quotation from Plutarch: "A good education, including proper instruction, is the first, second and last principal means by which youth become virtuous and happy; and all other advantages as riches, high birth, beauty, &c., in comparison with such an education are not worth striving after."

OUR GIRLS.

PART II.

ALL intelligent parents would agree, we hope, in recognizing that whatever sphere a daughter may be called upon to occupy, it is their duty to give her as good a preparation for life as possible.

What is the best preparation for life?

The most perfect development of body, mind and character which is possible to the child and within reach of the parents. We must begin by insisting that we can do very little more than aid in developing the natural gifts, activities and faculties with which a child comes into the world. We can teach a child Greek, you object, what amount of Greek does it bring into the world? Yes, we can, perhaps, if it has the faculty of speech, of memory, of observation, of imitation—and even if it has all these we might only find one hundred thousandth of all the children of England to whom it would be possible to teach Greek *effectively*. We can teach Higher Mathematics, how much Euclid and Algebra does a baby bring with it into the world? Well, none, we admit; but it has the faculty of number. It can soon distinguish between one doll and two, or three or four; and this faculty of number, so small in the savage that he can only in some cases count as far as the fingers on one hand, has been developed to such an extent by use and training that prodigies of Senior Wranglers dazzle us every year, and there are born geniuses in mathematics as well as in any of the arts. All the same, we find minds, and those not of a low order, to whom mathematics are absolutely impossible, however inspired the teacher and however great the desire to learn. The power of the teacher is limited—she cannot make this child a musician and that an orator—all she can do is to watch and discover indications of natural gifts, and provide favourable conditions for their development. But the teacher's power to harm is great. She can